

Wilderness Study Areas

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) requires the Secretary of the Interior to review areas of public land determined to have wilderness characteristics. Except for areas where additional lands have recently been placed under BLM administration, the wilderness inventory and review has been completed for public lands in the Dillon Field Office. BLM conducted this inventory and review in the 1980's with significant public involvement and in 1991, submitted recommendations through Secretary of the Interior to the President, and from the President to Congress. However, no action has been taken by Congress on these recommendations. As a result, the BLM must manage these lands under an Interim Management Policy (IMP) so as not to impair wilderness characteristics. Only Congress can designate an area as wilderness, or release areas from interim management.

Ten Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) lie within the Dillon Field Office planning area. They include:

- \$ the Ruby Mountains
- \$ the Blacktail Mountains
- \$ the East Fork of Blacktail Deer Creek
- \$ Hidden Pasture Creek
- \$ Bell and Limekiln Canyons
- \$ Henneberry Ridge
- \$ Axolotl Lakes
- \$ the Centennial Mountains
- \$ Farlin Creek Tack-on
- \$ Tobacco Root Tack-ons

The BLM will not revisit the recommendations previously forwarded to Congress. However, any lands that have been acquired since completion of the wilderness inventory that have not been studied will be reviewed in the RMP planning process as required by the FLPMA. BLM anticipates this acreage to be minimal given the comprehensive nature of the earlier review and the limited number of acquisitions since that time.

The RMP will also specify how lands under wilderness review will be managed if Congress makes a decision to release them during the life of the plan. Any areas designated by Congress as wilderness will be managed under regulations regarding the Management of Designated Wilderness Areas.

In addition to the WSAs, the Dillon Field Office manages the only BLM wilderness area in Montana. The Bear Trap Canyon Unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness covers about 6000 acres of public land straddling the lower Madison River below Ennis Lake. This land is managed to protect the wilderness values which resulted in its designation in 1983.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management
Dillon Field Office Resource Management Plan